



# Peaslake Farm Fields

COMMUNITY LED INITIATIVE

3 JULY 2023

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## Peaslake Community Bid - Peaslake Farm Fields

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## 1. Background

Peaslake Farm Fields and Peaslake Farm are owned by Shere Parish Council. The farm fields adjoin Peaslake Farm, which currently has planning permission for 8 new homes. Surrey Wildlife Trust and subsequently Friends of the Hurtwood withdrew from seeking an agreement to lease Peaslake Farm Fields in 2023 following negotiations with Shere Parish Council.

Peaslake community gave consideration to the evolving development proposals of the adjoining Peaslake Farm, as Stonewater Group, the housing association renegotiating the development, identified increasing the size and scale of the development on to the farm fields site as one option to make the Peaslake Farm project financially viable. Shere Parish Council rejected these proposals and are presently renegotiating rents and lease terms.

With the future of Peaslake Farm and Fields indeterminate the concept of a community led initiative to take on the lease and land management of Peaslake Farm Fields was conceived with the aim of securing and enhancing the intrinsic and latent value they hold for both community and wildlife.

Shere Parish Council agreed in June 2023 that a more detailed community scheme be put forward at the 05 July 2023 parish council meeting. A questionnaire sought the Peaslake community views on the farm fields in June 2023 and the results, shared with the community via the Peaslake Community Council on the 27<sup>th</sup> June, can be seen below.

## 2. Peaslake Farm Fields – A Community Led Initiative

A community led initiative seeks to take on the management of the Peaslake Farm Fields site via a long-term lease to manage the land in accordance with the criteria set out by Shere Parish Council [Appendix 1]. Criteria that include but is not limited to enhancing habitat, limiting public access, allowing Peaslake Fair parking and not allowing development on the land without prior permission. It would be anticipated that activities related to the landscape and habitat management or to the implementation of the uses outlined below would be carried out without the need for prior consent.

A community led bid would be delivered in partnership with local land management professionals and the community; drawing upon the rich resources and knowledge

within the community to deliver a sustainable and abundant resource for wildlife and community.

The Peaslake Farm Fields questionnaire was developed and distributed by hand and shared digitally within the local community over the period of 10 days in June 2023 and despite the limited time and distribution 108 returns were received. Results can be seen in Appendix 2.

### 3. Proposal Summary

The response rate of the questionnaire shared with the community in June 2023 illustrates a very high level of engagement of the Peaslake Community with this matter.

It is clear there is significant community support for preserving the Peaslake Farm Fields, with 94% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they contribute significantly to the beauty of the area.

The results also demonstrate significant support within the Peaslake community for all four proposed uses (Grazing, Food Growing, Orchard and Enhancing Biodiversity and Wildlife).

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This Community Led Initiative therefore seeks:

agreement from Shere Parish Council that recognises the interest and commitment from the Peaslake Community demonstrated in this draft proposal and therefore grants 3 months to enable a full and comprehensive Land Management proposal for Peaslake Farm Fields to be submitted by the community for the consideration of Shere Parish Council.

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## 4. A Community Led Initiative

### 4.a. Flood Management

We understand that Surrey County Council and the AONB along with Shere Parish Council agreed in principle to install shallow basins on the fields to slow down the flow of water when required. A first draft plan is expected in September 2023.

The development and practical implementation of the various land uses outlined in this Community Led Proposal would be designed, implemented and managed in accordance with the necessary flood management systems that will be put in place which will be subject to approval by the Environment Agency.

### 4.b. Grazing

#### **91% of questionnaire respondents supported the farm fields being used for grazing**

Reintroducing grazing animals would assist in generating habitat complexity and biodiversity as they trample and impact vegetation succession as well as transferring nutrients and dispersing seeds across the pasture.

- A grassland management plan of grazing and cutting would be developed as part of an overall Habitat Management Plan, with careful consideration given to nature conservation, maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the site as well as habitat creation.
- A grazing and hay cropping agreement would be sought with Coverwood Farm

### 4.c. Food growing

#### **65% of questionnaire respondents supported food growing**

Local food growing assists in addressing a range of issues from food provision and community activity, to food miles, provenance and climate change. It is envisaged that a community food growing project at Peaslake Farm Fields could contribute meaningfully to other community activity such as the village fairs, vegetable shows and street parties acting as a positive force for good in building our dynamic village, perhaps supporting our local businesses- the community shop or pub.

There is increasing recognition of wider benefits of community food growing including education, regeneration, health and well-being, and community cohesion. For example, 'Coronation Gardens For Food and Nature' has just been launched as a celebration of The King's vision for treasuring nature and living sustainably.

- It is proposed that a community food growing area would be clearly defined; fenced and hedged with carefully managed access for the community and no further access on to the areas designated for wildlife and grazing.
- The aim of the community food growing area would be to contribute to the protection and promotion of biodiversity.

#### 4.d. Orchard

##### 70% of questionnaire respondents supported an orchard

With almost 70% of our nation's apples being imported and the average Cox apple being sprayed 18 times enjoying organically grown fruit is an attractive proposition. There are oral accounts from long standing residents that an orchard previously stood on the Farm Fields site. Additionally establishing traditional orchards has been identified under the Government Countryside Stewardship grant scheme as being beneficial for biodiversity and as such is eligible for funding under the Countryside Stewardship grant provision.

- It is proposed that a traditional orchard is re-established and managed organically to benefit the environment.

#### 4.e. Enhanced Biodiversity and Wildlife

##### 94% of respondents supported the fields being used to enhance biodiversity & wildlife

Creating and restoring

It is proposed that:

- a site Habitat Management Plan would be developed and implemented to increase biodiversity on the land in tandem with a Grazing Management Plan.
- increase hedging runs

- undertake native tree planting adjacent to hedge lines
- maintain and increase the value of grassland habitat.
- Nurture existing wildlife

We would seek to:

- Work with AONB on Nature Recovery to create and restore wildlife habitats
- Develop an Environmental Management Plan to balance agricultural use and space with increasing biodiversity.
- Identify Environmental Land Management Schemes to assist in providing expertise and funding for habitat restoration and landscape recovery.

Other matters for consideration include;

- Habitat connectivity
  - We recognised that the connectivity of habitats is very important as it allows wildlife to move freely to access water, food, shelter and breeding habitat. We would seek to ensure habitat connectivity options exist within the mixed-use areas as well as exploring collaboration with Friends of the Hurtwood to maximise these areas in adjoining land.

## 5. Access

**74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed there should be no general public access to the fields (walkers, cyclists etc), with 62% in strong agreement. (16% neither agreed nor disagreed)**

**80% strongly agreed there should be no parking on the fields other than once a year for the Peaslake Fair**

The type of access to the site and particularly how that is managed will be given careful consideration in a further proposal with suitable restrictions put in place to meet the wishes of the community and the SPC criteria.

## 6. Governance

It is proposed that the governance structure will be such that it is held by the community for the community potentially in the form of a Community Interest Company (CIC) – a limited company structure designed with the aim of conducting activities for community benefit. The option of a charitable arm to assist in fundraising activities is also being explored.

We are undertaking evaluation of the various forms of governance structures and are seeking further expert advice on this aspect.

## 7. Expertise

The community questionnaire and this proposal has been created by community members and we will actively seek to further engage and draw upon the rich expertise available in the wider community.

We would identify the right tools, capacity, expertise and resources, to enable this community led initiative to have significant benefit to our community and nature recovery across the Peaslake Farm Fields site.

*Rosi Millar*

*A practicing garden designer and Lecturer in Horticulture I have experience in managing the development and implementation of large private and community gardens. I am passionate about nature beneficial horticulture and ecological restoration.*

*Keir Schiltz*

*I am a professionally qualified Teacher and Youth and Community worker for over 30 years with a specialist area of expertise in building Social Capital.*

*Shiona Bacon*

*I have lived in Peaslake since 1978, except when away at university! I am a Speech and Language Therapist by profession but have a keen interest in all things nature and am very committed to supporting the wonderful community we are all so lucky to enjoy, living here in Peaslake.*



*Sarah Small*

*I am a scientist and doctor by profession with a keen interest in environmental sustainability. Having lived in Peaslake since 2010 I am passionate about protecting its unique beauty and wonderful sense of community.*

Additional support will be sought from professional groups such as:

- Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
- Social Farms and Gardens
- Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF)
- The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
- AONB

## **8. Finance and Resources**

**22 residents strongly agreed with making a financial donation to support the fields**

**42 residents strongly agreed or agreed to volunteer time to the fields.**

In addition to the considerable expressed interest in supporting this initiative from the questionnaire respondents we would seek financial support from a variety of avenues. It is of note that:

- We do not seek ongoing financial support from Shere Parish Council.
- We seek a no fee Head Lease from Shere Parish Council.

### **8.a Finance- Flood Management**

Construction of flood mitigation measures would be the responsibility of Surrey County Council. Maintenance and clearance of the ditches to prevent flooding and maintenance of the tree line would be undertaken under the lease.

### **8.b. Finance- Grazing and Pasture**

Working with local land management experts we propose the prevailing maintenance of Peaslake Farm Fields would continue to be supported by:

- Tim Metson of Coverwood Farm, to graze and hay crop in exchange for grassland management.
- Martin Nicholson – would undertake approximately two days per annum for hedgerow / tree / ditch and land management

To maintain the fields as they exist now would cost under £1,000 per annum based on current expenditure.

### **8.c. Finance- Food Growing and Orchard**

Funding is available for the establishment of traditional orchards and community food growing initiatives under the Government Countryside Stewardship Scheme. There are also industry and business grant awarding bodies as well as schemes and funds that deliver finance and expertise to community led initiatives.

### **8.d. Finance- Enhancing Biodiversity and Wildlife**

Sources of funding would be sought in the form grants that are available from organisations such as:

- Countryside Stewardship Grants
- LEAF
- Surrey Hills Farming in Protected Landscapes
- Grants available to CICs
- DEFRA – farming in protected landscape fund

Additionally, we would seek:

- Charitable donations
- Circular economy support
- Community financial and resource support as indicated above

## 9. Conclusion

The flood prevention proposal due in September 2023 will impact upon land use and re-shape the landscape of the existing fields. The Community Led Proposal will deliver an initiative built around the flood management systems and the emerging principles of delivering a land management plan that meets the four purposes outlined above while preserving, maintaining and re-establishing habitat for wildlife and community.

### This Community Led Proposal therefore seeks:

Agreement from Shere Parish Council that recognises the appetite, interest and commitment from the community in a Community Led Initiative and therefore grants 3 months to enable a comprehensive draft of a full, robust community land management plan for Peaslake Farm Fields which supports the community desire for a mixed-use site that preserves the intrinsic beauty and improves biodiversity and habitat creation.

## Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria shall be used by SPC to assess proposals for managing Peaslake Farm fields. Organisations submitting their proposals should cover the points below.

### Long Term:

- a **long lease** of 25 years +
- Details of the long-term **sustainability of the bidding organization** as the Shere PC is looking for certainty
- a solution that includes a **back-up plan** if expected funding is not available.

### Design and Development:

- the **optimum flood protection** measures – refer to RPS report and other information provided by Shere PC
- an aesthetic design that maintains the **beauty of the valley**
- a solution that **nurtures existing wildlife**, encourages **further biodiversity** and **carbon capture** including targets
- clear and comprehensive **maintenance** plans that **minimise cost and risk** to the Council
- a solution that specifies **limited public access** but **allows Peaslake Fair parking**
- a solution that accepts **no development or structures** without prior permission
- land management **priorities**
- plans to work with **AONB on Nature Recovery** to create and restore wildlife habitats.

### Expertise:

- experience and **expertise** in wildlife friendly management and land management including removal of invasive species
- expertise and previous experience of (any) contractors
- proposals that are **technically sound**.

### Finance:

- a robust **finance plan** that supports i) maintenance ii) enhancements iii) flood mitigation
- a solid **financial platform** that supports long term maintenance and development of the land
- provide details on the **source of funding** ie Biodiversity credits or other available finance source.
- a solution that requires **no Parish Council funding**

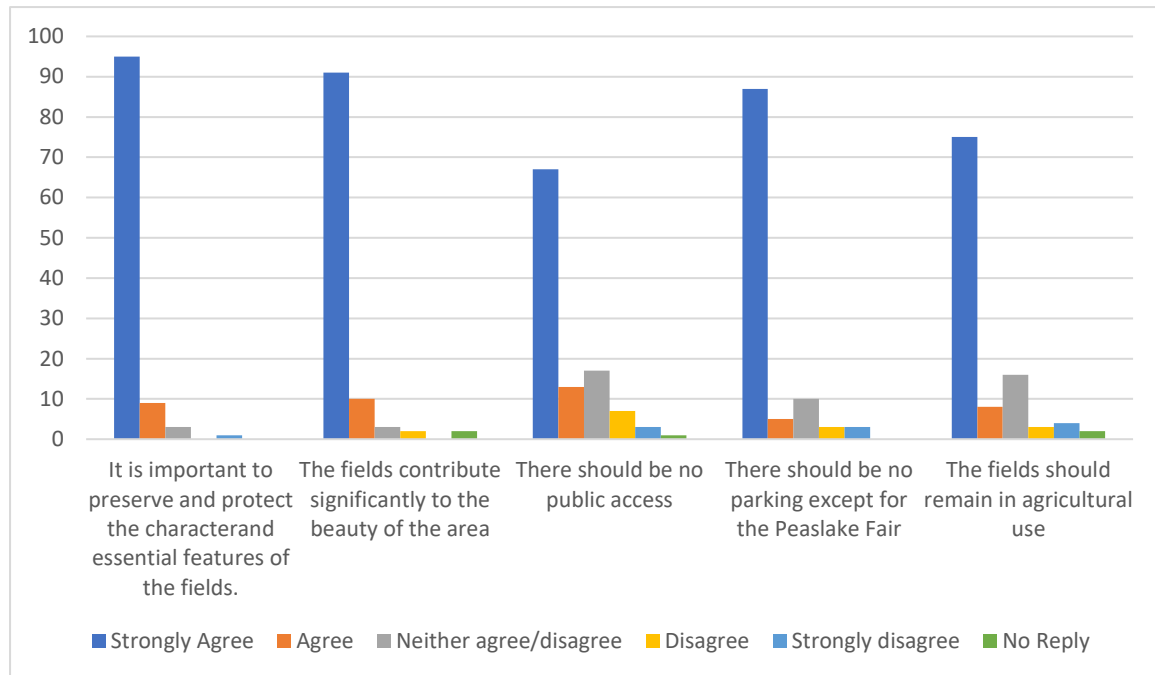
### Implementation

- A **plan** estimating the **scale of direct expenditure / time invested** in the land in years 1 and 2 of the contract. What are the **activities**? What would be the time investment - staff or contractors' time. If a longer -term **phased approach** – what resources are available to support it?
- A **timetable** of when they would expect to be in a position to enter into a **long-term contract** and begin **activity** on the work programme proposed in that contract.
- Include a proposed **schedule** and **prioritized list of activity** for the first two years of the contract.
- Proposals for **reporting progress** on attracting wildlife and reducing flood risks.

## Peaslake Farm Fields – Residents Survey 2023

The following bar charts analyse the responses from 108 residents.

**Table 1** shows the degree to which residents agreed with the following statements about the fields.



**Table 2** shows residents views on potential uses for the fields.

